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Chairman: Mr. FUENTES-IBAÑEZ (Bolivia)
(Vice-Chairman)

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In the absence of Mr. Khouini (Tunisia), Mr. Fuentes-Ibañez (Tunisia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 76: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/47/21 and 462 and Corr.1; A/SPC/47/L.9, L.10* and L.13)

1. Mr. MBA ALLO (Gabon) said that the introduction of multiparty system had led, nearly everywhere in Africa, and especially in Black Africa, to the freedom and pluralism of the media: it was now possible to read, hear and see everything. The question which arose was, in fact, of a technological nature: would national television channels survive the impending onslaught of technological and industrial innovation? With their inadequate institutional and legal frameworks and feeble resources, they could not remain competitive when challenged by the flow of high-technology foreign products.

2. In order to redress that structural imbalance and to lessen the impact of the unidirectional flow of information, the communications infrastructures of many developing countries should be strengthened, and training programmes for print journalists and radio and television broadcasters from those countries should be improved. In that context, Gabon supported the International Programme for Development of Communication sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and fully endorsed the central role of UNESCO in promoting the free flow of information and strengthening the communications capabilities of the developing countries, in particular.

3. The Gabonese delegation welcomed the useful and outstanding work accomplished during the year by the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat in promoting international cooperation in the field of communication; it noted, however, that problems remained.

4. Gabon supported the recommendations of the Committee on Information concerning the United Nations information centres; it hoped, however, that the role of such centres would be enhanced, particularly in the third world, since in many developing countries, they often constituted the sole source of information on the international policies of the United Nations, and also contained good research libraries. The Gabonese Government was currently exploring possibilities for cooperation with the Department of Public Information with a view to the opening of such a centre at Libreville. He took the opportunity to thank the members of the Committee on Information who had supported the requests by Gabon, Bulgaria and Haiti for information components (A/SPC/47/L.10*, para. 12).

5. With regard to the restructuring of the Department of Public Information, the Gabonese delegation drew the attention of the Secretariat to the importance of an equitable geographical distribution of posts within the

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Department. There was an imbalance in the representation of African countries, particularly French-speaking Black African countries, which should be redressed. A similar imbalance existed with regard to radio and television programmes; more programmes should be produced in French by French-speaking producers and correspondents.

6. The establishment of a multiparty system in Gabon two years earlier had gone hand in hand with quantitative and qualitative improvements in the field of information. Gabon had always supported the principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations, especially the basic principles of freedom of information and freedom of expression and opinion. Now, with the large number of publications and national television and radio channels, to which an international channel, Africa No. 1, had recently been added, pluralism had really been established in the information field. The National Council on Communication, an independent institutional body, was responsible for ensuring the exercise of democracy and freedom of the press throughout Gabonese territory. Gabon had thus succeeded in establishing a new domestic information and communication order, but could do still more with the assistance of friendly countries, non-governmental organizations and the Department of Public Information.

7. Mr. VALEV (Bulgaria) said that the profound changes which had swept across various parts of the globe over the past few years had not only confirmed the validity of the universally recognized ideals of freedom and democracy, but had also highlighted the importance of freedom of expression and opinion as a basic human right within the overall framework of human rights which the United Nations had upheld for decades. Bulgaria believed that such individual rights were part and parcel of the foundations of any democratic society; that conviction was embodied in the new Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, and was demonstrated in practice in the growing diversification of the Bulgarian mass media, as part of the overall process of democratization.

8. The new international climate, free of ideological confrontation, offered favourable opportunities for promoting international cooperation in various fields, including issues relating to information and communication. Furthermore, the broad and free dissemination of objective information, with due respect for the traditions and cultural achievements of all peoples, had become a prerequisite for the promotion and development of international cooperation in all spheres of modern life, and an increasingly important factor in the maintenance of international peace and security. Without freedom of information, it would be impossible to build mutual trust and understanding, which were the pillars of inter-State relations in the contemporary world.

9. His delegation supported the efforts to eliminate the existing disparities in the flow of information. The establishment of a more homogeneous information environment would be in the interests of all members

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of the international community and, in that connection, UNESCO activities under the International Programme for the Development of Communication aimed at helping developing countries to upgrade their communications systems, merited special attention and support. Providing easier access to modern communications technologies was of concern not only to developing countries, but also to a broader category of States.

10. The previous year, one of swift and dynamic change in the international situation, there had been a revitalization of faith and confidence in the potential of the United Nations. That tendency to enhance the role of the Organization in international affairs was paralleled by the emergence of a new public opinion more favourable to the United Nations and its activities. That situation made new demands on the Department of Public Information, which was a major component of the United Nations information system. His delegation supported the drive to further streamline United Nations information activities and congratulated the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information and the staff of the Department on their performance on such priority issues as international peace and security, disarmament, peace-keeping, human rights, economic and social development, etc.

11. At the same time, Bulgaria was aware that much remained to be done if the Department of Public Information was to meet the growing requirements for United Nations information activities. It was important for the Department to make the most efficient use of all resources at its disposal, especially at a time of serious financial difficulties for the Organization. The Department could re-examine its operations with a view to redeployment of human and financial resources to higher priority issues. Some DPI units were overstaffed at the expense of other services engaged in activities of greater importance for the entire international community.

12. Given the increased involvement of the United Nations in preventive diplomacy, peace-keeping and peacemaking, his delegation shared the idea expressed by some delegations that the Department of Public Information should devote more attention to such activities and missions. Introducing an information component at the planning stage of each peace-keeping operation could prove quite useful for the success of the operation.

13. His delegation was convinced of the importance of the United Nations information centres in enhancing the role and image of the Organization. It supported their integration, where appropriate, with United Nations Development Programme field offices, while preserving the functional autonomy of the information component. Such an approach would facilitate the widening of the United Nations network of information centres in a most cost-effective way. Bulgaria attached particular importance to the opening of a United Nations information centre in Sofia, and welcomed the first contact that had been made to that end with the UNDP Office in Sofia. Naturally, other countries also aspired to have such centres on their territories; therefore, the question of opening new United Nations information centres should be given

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due attention and every possibility should be carefully examined. Meanwhile, those countries that did not yet have such centres should be involved more actively in DPI programmes of interest to them.

14. He welcomed the spirit of cooperation and consensus established in the Committee on Information during its last three sessions. He hoped that that consensus would be maintained and that the Special Political Committee, as well as the General Assembly, would adopt the proposed drafts without a vote.

15. Ms. SAMATE (Burkina Faso) said that with the end of the bipolar world, the United Nations assumed a key role in realizing the ideals and objectives of the Charter. Now that the Organization was action-oriented it needed strong media support to disseminate its principles and publicize its activities, so that information was undeniably essential not only at the national level but also in promoting international relations, peace-keeping and peace-building, preventive diplomacy, environment and development, the defence of human rights, etc.

16. However, developing countries were faced with a de facto information monopoly purposely maintained by the countries of the Northern hemisphere, whose media broadcast to the Southern hemisphere information on the South that was more often biased than trustworthy. The South also had a chronic shortage of infrastructure, matériel and modern equipment. Burkino Faso therefore shared other delegations' concern that high priority should be given to technology transfer.

17. In addition, training and information were needed for those who must in turn inform the people. Burkina Faso therefore supported the Department of Public Information programme for journalists from developing countries and hoped there would be a proportionate increase in the number of participants. It also supported the International Programme for the Development of Communication begun by UNESCO and the cooperation between DPI and UNESCO in promoting media development and freedom of the press. There should also be an increase in exchanges among journalists, experts and information technicians through seminars. Particular emphasis should be put on the promotion of regional, interregional and international cooperation with a view to reducing development disparities between rich and poor countries.

18. Burkina Faso was firmly attached to the principle of the free flow of information and was convinced that the dissemination of accurate and objective information was fundamental to peace, security and development. It appreciated the activities and the determined efforts on the part of DPI to improve the quality of its publications, to meet the General Assembly's requirements and to disseminate information the world over.

19. Her delegation congratulated the Department on its efforts to overcome the five-year delay in publishing the Yearbook of the United Nations and gave a list of Burkina Faso newspapers that should be added to those appearing in

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the second 1992 edition of the World Media Handook; she also mentioned the programme Arc-en-ciel, produced by Burkina Faso national radio, which broadcast several children's programmes. Its free, independent and varied news programmes were not only informative but educational for the people of Burkina Faso.

20. Furthermore, she welcomed the adoption by consensus of the recommendations of the Committee on Information at its fourteenth session and supported the draft resolutions contained in its report (A/47/21). She also wished to offer some comments on the work of the Department of Public Information. The deplorable financial situation of Development Forum might force it to cease publication, although it was of major importance to the developing countries. Its financial situation must be examined carefully.

21. The establishment in some countries of United Nations interim offices, which were of proven importance, was welcome. Without opposing their establishment, she pointed out, however, that procedures had not been followed: current practice would require the General Assembly to decide to open such offices on the recommendation of the Committee on Information. Moreover, she was concerned about the requirements of those offices and hoped that their operation would not materially or financially affect the activities of existing centres.

22. In that regard, the continuing problem with the United Nations information centre in Ouagadougou, which served Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Chad, was a cause for concern. That Centre had been without a director since April 1991. Her delegation urgently requested the appointment of a new full-time director, given the importance of that centre. That appointment would not in any way damage the unified image of the United Nations, and would allow the centre to expand and strengthen its activities in schools, universities and rural areas, where the need to learn about the United Nations was increasingly apparent. It must be borne in mind that the credibility and prestige of the United Nations also depended on how people perceived the role of the Organization. The human and material resources of the Ouagadougou Centre should also be improved and strengthened.

23. Her delegation took note of the integration of 18 information centres (A/47/462, para. 108), but wondered about the impact of that operational integration which had been effected without taking into account the importance of those centres to African peoples, and despite repeated requests that the functioning of all centres should be evaluated leaving aside the financial considerations underlying that action, Burkina Faso would like to know the real purpose of the consolidation. In its opinion, it would have been better to conduct an evaluation and reorganization of those centres rather than to consolidate some and maintain others as they were.

24. Her delegation also reiterated its request for the extension of weekly news broadcasts such as Bonjour l'Afrique to some French-speaking radio

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networks, in particular the national radio network of Burkina Faso. News programmes on the preparatory activities for the various world conferences should be fleshed out, particularly those intended for developing countries. Her delegation commended the efforts to achieve parity in facilities and working methods for the coverage of meetings in English and French, but believed that the French-speaking service should be further improved.

25. Finally, Burkina Faso renewed its support for the Republic of Korea and Senegal as candidates for membership in the Committee on Information.

26. Mr. WYZNER (Under-Secretary-General for Public Information) thanked the members of the Special Political Committee for their constructive comments on the activities of the Department of Public Information. In response to the many speakers, including the representatives of Denmark (speaking on behalf of the five Nordic countries), the Islamic Republic of Iran, Nepal, the United Republic of Tanzania and the United Kingdom (speaking on behalf of the 12 members of the European Community), who had emphasized that the Department required adequate resources, he regretted, as the representative of Argentina had stated, that demand so often exceeded supply. He agreed, therefore, with the views expressed by the representatives of Bulgaria, Poland, Senegal and the United Kingdom that DPI would be better prepared to react to unexpected events and to the emerging priorities of the world community if it had greater budgetary flexibility. He assured the representative of Brazil that the posts and resources allocated for research and the collection of information and for secretariat services to the Publications Board had been transferred to the Department of Public Information along with the respective functions.

27. He thanked the many delegations, particularly those of Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Myanmar, Pakistan (on behalf of the Group of 77) and Poland, which had reaffirmed their support for Development Forum, the only United Nations system-wide publication on economic and social issues, which could be forced to cease publication due to lack of funds. The matter had been submitted to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), whose recommendations would soon be transmitted to the General Assembly through the Fifth Committee. The magazine Africa Recovery was experiencing similar financial problems, although less acute. The representatives of Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria had emphasized the need to provide adequate resources in order to maintain that publication, which had a wide audience and fulfilled the important function, emphasized by the representative of Senegal, of informing the world community on positive economic developments in Africa. Its costs could not be entirely absorbed within the regular budget of the Department of Public Information, but every effort would be made to cover them entirely in the 1994-1995 proposed programme budget.

28. After thanking the delegations which had praised the Yearbook of the United Nations and the World Media Handbook, he informed those which had pointed out errors and omissions, particularly the Czech and Slovak Federal

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Republic, that the database for the preparation of the next edition was constantly being updated.

29. Replying to the representative of Pakistan who had requested the strengthening of Urdu language radio programmes within DPI, he said that the Department currently was reviewing the format and content of those programmes and would discuss the matter with the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation. Unfortunately, the possibility of producing programmes in new languages was limited by the lack of resources. It would be impossible, therefore, to produce programmes in Nepali as requested by the representative of Nepal, but the Department could furnish the necessary raw materials to Nepali broadcasters. It was of the highest importance for the future of the United Nations to reach youth, and the Department of Public Information was attempting to place radio programmes with university radio stations, an effort which the United States delegation had endorsed.

30. Replying to the representatives of Benin, Gabon and Burkina Faso, he said that, in addition to "L'Afrique à l'ONU", the francophone stations received a weekly 15-minute feature documentary entitled "Perspectives internationales", covering such priority issues as African economic recovery, the situation of African children, peace-keeping, AIDS, hunger, refugees, apartheid and the environment, as well as a bimonthly programme entitled "Femmes", on the status of women. In addition, the current affairs magazine "Bonjour l'Afrique" was fed to Radio Cairo for international short-wave broadcast. The Department was seeking to expand its cooperation with radio stations that had powerful transmitters covering target areas in neighbouring countries. A recent pilot cooperation project with Africa No. 1 should result in the regular transmission of United Nations news from Gabon to the whole of West Africa. Currently, 40 African radio stations, including Radiodiffusion du Benin, were using taped United Nations radio programmes in French.

31. Many delegations, including those of Argentina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, Czechoslovakia, Denmark (on behalf of the five Nordic countries), India, Kuwait and the United Kingdom (on behalf of the 12 countries of the European Community), had highlighted the important role played by the Department of Public Information in peacemaking, peace-keeping and preventive diplomacy.

32. The Department of Public Information agreed that peace-keeping operations and similar missions should have an information component. Good information programmes could help to generate support and increase mission effectiveness by fostering a better understanding and appreciation of the role of the United Nations, both in the area of operations and in the rest of the world, particularly the troop-contributing countries. That was why the Department of Public Information tried to evaluate a mission's public information needs early in the planning stage. In cooperation with the department concerned, it had prepared standards for programmes of that type. He concurred with the representative of the United Kingdom that each operation should receive sufficient funding to disseminate information in accordance with those

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standards. The Department would endeavour to find the resources to respond adequately to unforeseen situations and to continue publication of the reference materials, whose usefulness had been emphasized by many delegations.

33. Replying to the representatives of Cuba, Haiti and the United Kingdom, he said that the Secretary-General and the Secretariat attached great importance to disseminating information on the dramatic situation in Somalia and the Organization's efforts to relieve the suffering, as demonstrated by the exhibit currently on display in the General Assembly Hall lobby.

34. The Department of Public Information was working to keep the world informed of the repercussions of the Chernobyl disaster, a topic to which the delegation of Belarus attached high priority. In addition to producing press releases and radio programmes, the Department had arranged several press conferences on the subject for the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

35. The Department of Public Information had established a task force to assist the General Assembly Preparatory Committee for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations and had begun to prepare several television programmes, publications, exhibits and other events. As requested by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Secretariat would report on those preparations to the Committee on Information at its next session.

36. A number of delegations - Benin, China, the Congo, Gabon, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan and Viet Nam - had inquired about equitable geographical distribution in recruitment within the Department of Public Information. Working with the Office of Human Resources Management, the Department was making every effort to ensure equitable geographical and gender representation. However, the existing freeze on recruitment made it difficult to correct imbalances.

37. Several delegations had expressed concern at the allocation of resources to the United Nations information centres, whose importance had been stressed by a great many delegations. A report on that topic had been submitted to the Committee on Information in 1992, and another could be submitted in 1993. A dialogue with the developed countries in which information centres were located had been initiated and would be pursued. Several countries were already making contributions; Greece had recently joined them, and France, Italy and Spain had indicated that they planned to do the same. A number of delegations, including those of Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, the Congo, Gabon, Lebanon, the Niger, Poland and the United Republic of Tanzania, had inquired about the centre's future. The Department would make every effort to implement the relevant resolutions within the limits of available resources.

38. He assured delegations that the integration process, guided by the recommendations of the Committee on Information, would not undermine the

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functional autonomy of the information component of the field offices of the United Nations Development Programme and that it would take the Department's mandates into account.

39. The representative of the United States had mentioned the need for the Department to develop clear objectives for its information products. As he himself had indicated in his statements to the Special Political Committee and to the Committee on Information at its fourteenth session, clearly defined objectives, sound targeting of audiences and careful evaluation of impact were becoming an integral part of the Department's programmes. The Yearbook of the United Nations, the UN Chronicle, radio programmes and liaison activities with non-governmental organizations - to name just a few - reflected that concern.

40. With respect to the question raised by the representatives of Benin, Chile and the Niger, multimedia information programmes would be designed for the upcoming major conferences, including the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 and the Fourth World Conference on Women and world summit for social development in 1995. The Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC) would coordinate their implementation at the inter-agency level. Following the Rio Conference, the Department had been able to disseminate key information materials with financial assistance from the Danish Government. The representative of Denmark had drawn attention to the need to promote post-Conference activities. The Department would continue to carry out its task in that field.

41. With respect to the anti-apartheid programmes to which the representatives of Bangladesh, the Congo, Costa Rica, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Poland and Yemen had referred, the Department would review them as warranted by developments in the situation in South Africa, which it was following very closely.

42. In response to requests from a number of delegations, the Department would continue to work with UNESCO, particularly through the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), to provide assistance in the development of communications infrastructures in the developing world and in the training of print journalists and radio and television broadcasters in developing countries. Several seminars had been organized in cooperation with UNESCO, including those at Windhoek and Alma Ata. Chile had offered to host a regional seminar in 1993 and Yemen had expressed interest in hosting a regional seminar when circumstances permitted.

43. With regard to the need to diversify information sources, cited by the representatives of Cameroon, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Viet Nam, the Department had always welcomed cooperation with the news agencies of the non-aligned countries with a view to reaching wider audiences.

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44. The Department wanted to improve the working conditions of journalists accredited to the United Nations, but the lack of office space in the Secretariat building was a major problem. The press office space on the third and fourth floors of the Secretariat building would probably have to be redesigned. In the meantime, the Department would continue to explore all possible avenues in consultation with the interested parties.

45. Owing to time constraints he could not address many of the valuable observations made during the debate; however, he would give them careful consideration with his colleague.

46. In conclusion, Member States and the Department of Public Information should explore new avenues for bringing the message of a revitalized United Nations to the peoples of the world.

47. Mr. LOPEZ OSPINA (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)), referring to the suggestions made during the debate for strengthening the communication capacity of developing countries, providing a greater number of States with access to modern communication technologies, widening the free flow of information and reducing existing disparities in the field of information dissemination, welcomed the emphasis placed by the Nordic countries on enhancing the communication capacity of the developing world in their discussions with developing countries on economic cooperation. It was primarily through the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), which once again was being supported in the draft resolutions by the States represented on the Committee on Information, that UNESCO provided assistance to developing countries by training specialized personnel and organizing seminars and workshops. He was gratified to note that the seminars organized in cooperation with the Department of Public Information at Windhoek and in Kazakhstan had been warmly received.

48. UNESCO would do its utmost to enhance its cooperation with the Department of Public Information and other United Nations agencies and programmes with a view to furthering the development of information and communication. As some delegations had suggested, cooperation with universities in the field of information should make it possible to bring the socio-economic and cultural aspects of individual regions into clearer focus. Information made a major contribution to the enrichment of human culture and civilization.

49. Lastly, he thanked those delegations that had supported the proposal to declare 3 May as International Press Freedom Day.

50. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it the Committee wished to adopt draft resolution A/SPC/47/L.9, on information in the service of humanity, and draft resolution A/SPC/47/L.10 (reissued), on United Nations public information policies and activities. The statement of

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programme budget implications of the latter draft resolution was contained in document A/SPC/47/L.13.

51. Draft resolutions A/SPC/47/L.9 and L.10 were adopted without a vote.

52. Mr. SUHAIL (Pakistan), speaking in his capacity as Acting Chairman of the Committee on Information, welcomed the adoption by consensus of the two draft resolutions and said that the decision reflected the importance which the Committee attached to questions relating to information. It was important to maintain the consensus which had been obtained through the cooperation displayed by the members of the Group of 77, China, and others so that the Committee could carry out its task and formulate recommendations for the Department of Public Information. He also welcomed the Republic of Korea and Senegal to the Committee.

53. Mr. BACKSTROM (Finland), speaking on behalf of Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Leichtenstein, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, commended the Chairman and the members of the Special Political Committee for their constructive debate on information questions and for the adoption of the draft resolutions by consensus. He also wished to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information for his review of his Department's activities and, in particular, for organizing informational meetings on questions of great interest to Member States. He also welcomed the Republic of Korea and Senegal as new members of the Committee on Information.

54. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the draft decision contained in paragraph 80 of the report of the Committee on Information (A/47/21) to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 79 to 81 by appointing the Republic of Korea and Senegal as members and suggested that the Committee should adopt the draft decision without a vote.

55. The draft decision contained in paragraph 80 of the report of the Committee on Information (A/47/21) was adopted without a vote.

56. The CHAIRMAN announced that, having concluded its consideration of agenda item 76, the Committee would defer consideration of agenda item 74 until Monday, 23 November. The list of speakers for that item would be closed on that day at the end of the afternoon meeting.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.